

18 MAR 2001
Mahathir-F1
TURNOUT FOR F1 RACE VERY GOOD, SAYS MAHATHIR

SEPANG, March 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is happy with the turnout at the Sepang F1 Circuit today for the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix despite a drop in the number of spectators compared to last year.

"The turnout was very good considering that this race was held less than six month after the last race," the Prime Minister said.

He said he was informed that 75,000 people came to watch the F1 race compared to 88,000 for last year's event held in October. The organisers had printed 90,000 tickets for today's race.

Dr Mahathir expressed confidence that next year's race, to be held exactly one year from now, would attract more people.

"I expect people by then will have enough enthusiasm to come here. I am sure a lot more people will be coming," he told reporters at the end of the race.

Dr Mahathir disagreed that the lower turnout was because of higher hotel rates are reduced interest from foreigners.

"I think the hotels are all fully occupied despite the high rate. I think that is not the main reason.

"I think this race is held too soon after the last race. That is the reason there were not as many foreigners compared to last year," he said.

The Prime Minister said said more people abroad had come to know Malaysia after it began hosting the F1 race in 1999.

"I think a lot of people now probably know Sepang more than they know Malaysia. This is all for good...I think more people know Malaysia than before we had F1 racing," he said.

Dr Mahathir said many people had given a positive feedback on the circuit here and the way the race was organised.

"This is the best circuit and the race is very well organised. They were very impressed and willing to give positive opinion about SIC (race organiser Sepang International Circuit).

"The same comment was received in the first year, more of it in the second year, and today too they were very positive in their comments," he said.

The Prime Minister said the government was willing to provide incentives to develop the motorsport industry in the country.

"I think the people who are interested in motorsports can come up with suggestions and the government is ever willing to support, encourage and probably give some incentives, provided of course this will benefit the country's economy," he said.

Dr Mahathir called on the private sector to play a more active role in promoting motorsports and other sports, saying it was more competent at this.

On the role of government agencies in promoting the sport, he said: "I think the Ministry of Tourism will be very interested to work closely with the organiser, and people involved in motorsports and motoring as a whole should be brought in."

Dr Mahathir described today's race, won by triple world champion Michael Schumacher, as very exciting.

"For the first time they got the real Malaysian weather complete with rainstorm.. I think it is something of a new experience for them (because initially they complained that it was very hot). So it was a very exciting

race," he said.

On the move to telecast the race live after the people had initially been told that there would only be a delayed telecast, Dr Mahathir said the organiser resorted to this to persuade more people to come and watch the race.

"But I think it was not necessary because the people will come anyway. Generally of course those people watching on television will not spend a single sen to come here. Probably some people get the kick out of watching television while others want to see the real thing," he added.

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